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Verses for Christmas.

VERSES FOR CHRISTMAS.

BY

S. MASSEY.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY C. C. SCHENCK.

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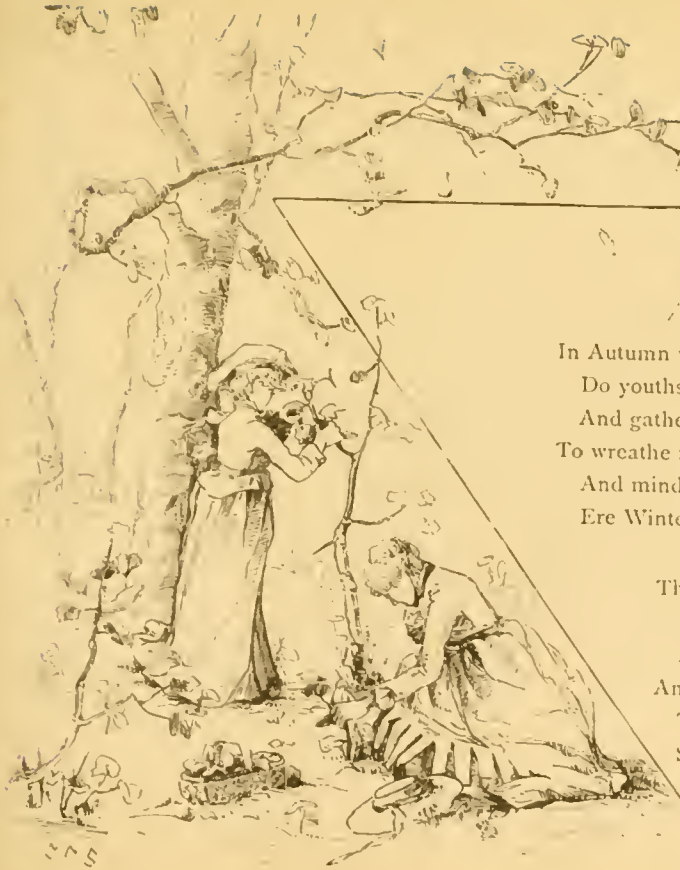
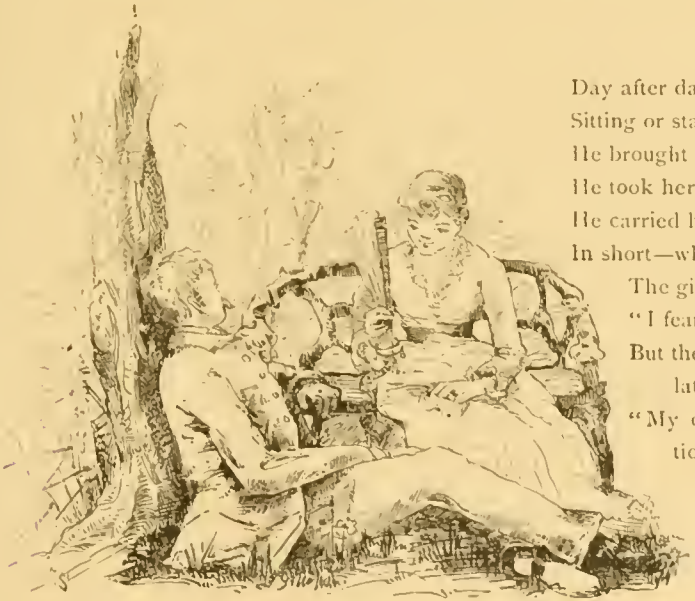


Autumn

In Autumn when the bright leaves fall
Do youths and maids make holiday,
And gather many a choice nosegay
To wreathe round hearth, and bower, and hall,
And mind them of each past delight
Ere Winter's touch hath wrought its blight!

Thus have I picked these *stray leaves*, blown
From trees in Fancy's garden wide,
And ranged them humbly side by side,
And trembling, sent them forth unknown!
Too thankful only if they make
Some dull hour brighter for their sake.

A Summer Flirtation.



Day after day he was found at her side,
Sitting or standing, in walk or in ride.
He brought her candies, flowers, books,
He took her rambles to shady nooks;
He carried her parasol, work, or chair—
In short—where *she* was, *he* was there!
The girls all envious, softly sighed:
"I fear he is very far gone," they cried.
But the matrons whispered in confabulation,
"My dear, it is only a summer flirtation!"

At night in the moonlight, stretched at her feet,
He would murmur of love and its mission sweet;
Would toy with her shawl or slyly press
Her hand in a timid, soft caress,
Whilst she laughed and blushed behind her fan,
And thought he was "such a lovely man."
The girls looked on with a very ill grace,
And wished themselves in their comrade's place.
But the matrons nodded in consultation,
"Depend on it—'tis but a summer flirtation!"

The summer ended, as all things must,
Its glories faded and turned to dust.
They bade farewell. He said: "In town
We shall meet." He took her number down;
Gave books and flowers. "Would she take
And keep them always for *his* sake?"

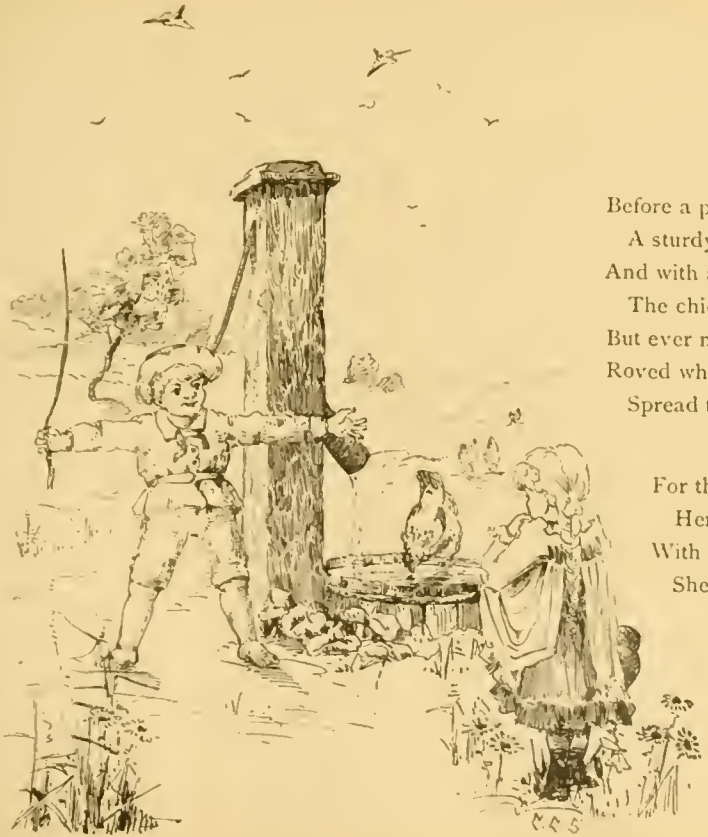
The girls looked on, and deeply moved
Cried: "See how constant he has proved!"
But the matrons said: "This adoration
Is the usual end to a summer flirtation."

And so *she* found. In idling away
The tedious hours of a summer's day,
He had stolen her heart and (oh! most sad!)
The victor was not of his trophy glad!
He never came, though long she would wait,
And her heart bound high at each "click" of the gate.
The girls now peacefully watched afar
And sniffed: "What bold things some girls are!"
But the matrons cried in exultation:
"Did not we tell you? A summer flirtation!"

And now, when falls the twilight dim
In pensive mood, she thinks of him,
As crowding round her thick and fast
Come beauteous visions of the past.
Such lovely visions, that but now
Call up the warm blood to her brow,
And to her heart a new sensation.

* * * * * *

But to him—'twas only "another flirtation."



Paying Toll.

Before a pump an urchin stood,
  A sturdy imp and brown;
And with a switch he scattering chased
  The chickens up and down.
But ever now and then his glance
Roved where the meadow's green expanse
  Spread to the road.

For there a wee maid tripping came
  Her earthen bowl to fill
With water from the friendly pump.
  She trembled, and stood still,
    As quick the brown imp wide
      outflings
    His arms, whilst lustily he sings·
      "First, pay me toll!"

The little maid holds coyly back,
  And then once more returns;
The water she must have, and so
  The rogue his guerdon earns!
Then looks she on in shy delight,
Whilst pumps the boy with all his might,
  Till high the water churns.

A maiden stands beside a fence
  Whence leads a wicket-gate;
(It is our same dear little maid,
  But grown more sedate.)
And on the other side a youth—
  The same brown rogue we knew—
Holds fast the struggling hand that tries
  The wicket to undo.
"Come! Not so fast," he cries, "my lass,
But one small thing before you pass—
  First, pay me toll!"

She stands before the altar-rails,
  Our blushing, happy maid;
And by her side the brown youth too,
  In wedding-togs arrayed.
And as he lifts her veil he cries,
Whilst love and mirth gleam in his eyes,
  "Sweet, pay me toll!"

Shadows.

Morning shadows on the snow
Softly come, brightly go;
Of men, with loud and lusty voice,
Maidens, whose young hearts rejoice
At the brightness all around.
Children playing on the ground,
With shrill whoop and shout of glee;
Careless they,—whatever be!
Thus the shadows on the snow
Softly come, brightly go,
Whilst the life streams onward flow,
Onward flow!

Noontide shadows on the snow
Wearily come, sadly go;
Men, with faces pale and wan
As the distant skies they scan;
Maidens, listless grown, oppressed,
With head hanging low on breast;
Children, tired from their play,
Whimpering crossly by the way.
    Thus the shadows on the snow
    Wearily come, sadly go,
    As the life-streams onward flow,
        Onward flow!

Midnight shadows on the snow
Wildly come, madly go;
From sin's redly-gleaming haunts
A poor fluttering creature flaunts;
Kindred she to that fair girl
Of dewy lip and golden curl;
Past a staggering drunkard reels,
Vainly for support he feels;
Brother he to men that rise
And front the world with level eyes.
Children cursing, stealing, they
Also kin to those at play.
    Thus the shadows on the snow
    Wildly come, madly go,
    As the life-streams onward flow,
        Onward flow!

Hark! the bells across the snow
Merrily come, cheerily go;
And they cry, "Oppressed and lonely,
Come, where pure life dwelleth only;
Leave these shadows, never they
Enter the domain of day!
Men and women, young and old,
Come, the Christ child's face behold.
    Once more on the earth He lies,
    Bathed in light that never dies;
    As the life-streams outward flow,
        Outward flow!"

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